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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 000767

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: SMALL STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

REF: ISLAMABAD 617

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: As a conciliatory gesture to the opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani presented April 10 a parliamentary resolution to endorse the 2006 Charter of Democracy (CoD) and to create a committee to review the repeal of enhanced presidential powers placed in the Constitution by former President-General Pervez Musharraf. While PML-N contacts reveal that Nawaz Sharif has expressed to Gilani his party's interest in returning to the federal cabinet, retaking the portfolios party members once had, the PML-N Spokesman made clear to PolOff that more serious discussion of "unity governments," both at the national and provincial levels, would wait until the CoD was actually implemented. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed April 10 Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani's resolution endorsing the Charter of Democracy (CoD), which was signed in 2006 by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif. The resolution further called for the formation of an all parties committee to review the numerous proposals for an 18th Constitutional Amendment, all of which would repeal, at least in part, the 17th Amendment pushed through by former President-General Pervez Musharraf.

¶3. (C) The opposition PML-N is demanding that the President's prerogative to make key appointments and to dissolve the parliament, embodied in the 17th Amendment, be transferred to the Prime Minister, as promised in the CoD. While PML-N Spokesman Siddiq-ul-Farooq acknowledged to PolOff that the April 10 resolution is a "positive first step," he further clarified that his party would not decide whether to re-join the PPP-led federal government until the CoD was implemented. This move would be reciprocated with the PPP's re-joining the PML-N-led Punjab government, ul-Farooq added. However, amending the Constitution would be a months-long process, he explained (reftel).

¶4. (C) Pakistan Labor Federation president Abdul Qadir Shaheen informed Consulate Lahore that Nawaz called Gilani at 0100 April 10 to convey the PML-N's interest in re-joining the federal government. Nawaz reportedly added the request that PML-N parliamentarians who previously held portfolios in the PPP-led GOP would regain those same positions. Such an arrangement would return Senator Ishaq Dar as Finance Minister and National Assembly member Ahsan Iqbal as Education Minister, Shaheen specifically noted.

¶5. (C) Other Consulate Lahore contacts confirmed the late

night call, adding the PM invited the Sharif brothers to meet in Islamabad on April 12. Deputy Speaker of the Punjab Provincial Assembly Rana Mashood also acknowledged April 10 that a "critical meeting" between the two parties, leadership would take place April 12, though Shaheen separately revealed Nawaz had not yet decided whether he or his brother Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif would attend the Islamabad gathering.

¶6. (C) Comment: It is encouraging that PPP and PML-N leaders are both privately and publicly trying to mend fences following last month's street protests and political brinksmanship. However, as PML-N's ul-Farooq pointed out, his party will now demand concrete results, not merely promises, from the PPP's President Asif Zardari or statements by Gilani from the parliamentary floor. For now, the PML-N is likely to go back to being a "loyal opposition;" discussion of a "unity government" remains premature. End comment.

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